

# Robert Remini Tapped to Pen House History

## Committee Members Opt for Single Author Over Collection of Chapters by Many

By Ben Pershing

Historians and Hill officials leading the effort to produce a comprehensive history of the House have agreed on a format and are close to securing prize-winning historian Robert Remini to author the work.

Originally the brainchild of Rep. John Larson (D-Conn.), a bill authorizing the project was signed into law in November 1999. An advisory committee of historians, current and former Members, and other officials was formed soon after.

The committee held its only official meeting in January 2001, but informal discussions led by Library of Congress officials led to the selection of Remini, a professor emeritus of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

LOC officials are currently negotiating with Remini's literary agent and hope to have him on board by July.

Remini, who has worked at UIC since 1965, is best known for several books he has written on Andrew Jackson. His three-volume biography of the seventh president won the National Book Award in 1984. Remini has also written books on Henry Clay and Daniel Webster and has an upcoming tome about John Quincy Adams.

"Robert Remini is a first-rate historian," said Senate Historian Richard Baker. "He's



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**Rep. John Larson introduced the bill calling for a comprehensive history of the House to be written. The bill was signed into law in November 1999.**

an outstanding scholar and he really has a feel for Congress and how Congress works."

One issue that has come into clearer focus is how the history will be funded. Under the current plan, whatever costs aren't covered by sales and an advance from the publisher

would be defrayed through the solicitation of private funding.

That effort will be led by the LOC's development office.

Larson's original bill said the Library "may" solicit private donations to fund the project, but "may" was changed to "shall" during the bill's markup and it was generally understood at the time that public funds would not be used to pay for the effort.

That issue prompted concern from some attendees at the advisory committee's meeting last year, with some historians suggesting that Congress would need to ante up a portion of the money if the project were to be successful.

LOC officials see the current market for historical books as strong and hope that having Remini attached to the project will help se-

cure a good deal with a publisher. That effort will begin after Remini comes on board and sketches out a proposal.

"In addition to having a much more fleshed-out proposal, we need to have some sample chapters," said Ralph Eubanks, director of publishing for the LOC. "We're going to put it out there and see how much the work would actually draw."

Because officials working on the project hope to cover as much of the cost as possible through sales, attracting a big-name author was a high priority.

Larson said "everyone's first choice" was Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David McCullough, though it soon became clear that bringing him on board wouldn't be feasible because of his busy schedule.

While there currently are no plans to appropriate any public funds for the project, Larson said he wants that possibility to remain on the table.

"It's my hope that there might be some money that they put in for this," Larson said, referring to the House GOP leadership, which is represented on the advisory committee by Rules Chairman David Dreier (Calif.).

In addition to funding and authorship issues, members of the advisory committee debated various formats for the work in their one formal meeting last year and in informal discussions since then.

The tome could have been the work of several authors contributing different chapters, but in the end, Eubanks said, there was agreement that "the sales potential of a single-author work would be much greater."

Eubanks added that the book would be "more a work of narrative nonfiction with a couple of picture sections" rather than a fully illustrated work, which tend not to sell as well.

### DRILLING HOME THEIR POINT

